DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 290 HE 027 307

AUTHOR	Hansel, Bettina
TITLE	An Investigation of the Re-Entry Adjustment of Indians Who Studied in the U.S.A. Occasional Papers in Intercultural Learning, Number 17.
INSTITUTION	AFS International/Intercultural Programs, Inc., New York, NY. Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning.
SPONS AGENCY	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Office of International Education.; Syracuse Univ., NY. Div. of International Programs.
PUB DATE	Dec 93
NOTE	28p.
AVAILABLE FROM	AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning, 313 East 43rd St., New York, NY 10017.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; Coping; Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Context; *Cultural Influences; *Culture Conflict; Culture Contact; Employment; Family Relationship; Foreign Culture; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; *Sociocultural Patterns; Stress Variables; *Student Adjustment
IDENTIFIERS	*Foreign Students Home Country Reentry; *India; United States

ABSTRACT

This study explored the readjustment experience of 49 Indians who came to the United States to study and then returned to their home country. Interviews revealed that most experienced some stress or difficulty after their re-entry, with problems ranging from initial anxiety about getting a job or shock at the crowded conditions, pollution, or the frustrations of power and telephone outages, to an intense period of depression and alienation. A few who had been back in India for 4 to 5 years were still having a difficult time, while some students who had been back for less than a year seemed quite comfortable with their lives in India. Twelve interviewees specifically mentioned that they "think about going back" to the United States. Factors in difficult re-entries related to cultural differences, economic differences, changes in values, and having to make adjustments in many aspects of their lives such as changing family roles and changing from student life to work life. Profiles of five returned students are presented to illustrate their very different re-entry experiences. Issues discussed include returning to mutual dependence in the family, marriage and family, the job search, the work environment, national identity, attitudes, and coping strategies. (Contains 14 reference notes.) (JDD)

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An Investigation of the Re-entry Adjustment of Indians who Studied in the U.S.A.

by Bettina Hansel

Occasional Papers in Intercultural Learning

Number 17. December 1993.

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An Investigation of the Re-entry Adjustment of Indians who Studied in the U.S.A.

Bettina Hansel, Ph.D.
AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning

Acknowledgements

In 1991-92, I spent three months in India through an Indo-American Fellowship for advanced research. Having studied the exchange experience at AFS for more than a decade, I had proposed a study related to student exchange and was pleased to learn that both the Indian and the U.S. governments felt this issue was important enough to fund my project. I am indebted to the staff of the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars, particularly Lydia Gomes and Marianne Cunningham who helped me make my preparations for this experience.

I would like to thank all those who supported my work in India, especially those who so willingly agreed to be interviewed for this project, who invited me into their homes for meals, who took a special interest in my project, and who welcomed me so warmly to their country. I am particularly grateful to the entire staff of the American Institute for Indian Studies, and its Director, Dr. Pradeep Mahendirata, who dealt with the logistics of my stay in India. I also thank my sponsoring institution, Jawaharlal Nehru University, where I stayed for much of my time in New Delhi, and my dear friend and sponsor there, Dr. Saraswati Raju.

The study would not have been possible without the support of the U.S. Educational Foundation in India and Dr. Sharda Nayak, who provided my introduction to the USEFI offices in New Delhi, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. These offices, their directors and student counselors, provided my contacts with virtually all of those I interviewed. I am especially grateful to Dr. Nayak and Ms. Sarina Paranjapé in Delhi, Dr. Dilip Patwardhan and Ms. Roopa Desai Trilokekar in Bombay, Ms. Geetha Nayar and Ms. Rajalakshmi Sankarnarayanar in Madras, and Dr. Uma Das Gupta and Ms. Kumkum Mittal in Calcutta, all of whom were extremely helpful in putting me in contact with former students. Without this support, the research could never have been completed in three months.

This number of the *Occasional Papers* series presents a discussion of the findings of this research.

December 1993

An Investigation of the Re-entry Adjustment of Indians who Studied in the U.S.A.

by Bettina Hansel
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Colleges and universities in the United States have increasingly attracted students from around the world, about 75% coming from developing countries.[1] While still under 10% of the national student body on average, international students in engineering and science departments are often found in much higher proportions. Since these departments often have trouble attracting enough students from the United States who are as qualified to fill these slots, international students who come from top level institutions in their own countries are often aggressively recruited, highly valued for the talents they bring to the U.S. academic departments, and given opportunities to stay on as faculty members or post-doctoral researchers.[2] Others find opportunities for professional employment at salaries that far outstrip those they could earn back home, even when assuming greater living expenses in the U.S.

While the United States may seem to benefit from the influx of foreign talent, a negative side of this trend is that developing countries may be in desperate need of their most talented people, who might put their talents to use in their own country's development efforts. For this reason, USAID (through NAFSA) and the International Organization for Migration have made funds available to pilot test programs designed to help returning students successfully readjust and be productive in their own culture.[3] Though it is not clear that sending countries lose significantly when their students permanently migrate to the United States, there is general agreement that the returning students with their enhanced skills can play a very important role in national development if they are able to establish themselves in an appropriate career to make the best use of their talents.[4]

Indian students make up nearly 6% of the total foreign student population in the U.S., making it one of the top ten nations sending students for study in the United States.[5] The Indian Institutes of Technology are just an example of some of the top-level educational institutions in India that have earned an international reputation for the quality of their students. In these institutions, the best students are typically encouraged to apply for advanced training in the United States, and many do so simply as a matter of course.

Students from India have had to make an enormous cultural adjustment in coming to the United States, even while their normal fluency in English may ease some of the communication problems faced by students from other countries. The four obvious differences in the patterns of family, diet, clothing, and religion give a quick measure of how different these two societies are. As one woman said, "it's hard to believe that India and America exist on the same planet." In the United States they must adjust to a more independent life than they were likely to lead in India. Many, for example, are faced for the first time with the need to cook their own food or wash their own clothes. Life on the campus of a U.S. university exposes them to a range of very alien values, from a very informal classroom atmosphere where they are encouraged to question the professors and draw their own conclusions to a social life among their peers that often includes a more ready acceptance of alcohol, dating, and pre-marital sex.

Yet most Indians do adjust to the United States and frequently enjoy the atmosphere of their universities. They are often encouraged to remain in the United States, typically lured by job opportunities that seem unmatchable in India. The Americans they meet also may encourage them to stay in the U.S. Many do stay: a commonly cited figure is that 80% of those who study in the U.S.A. do not return permanently to India.[6] Figures quoted by Ong *et al* show that from 1972-85 almost 50,000 highly educated Indians migrated permanently to the United States; of these, some 31,000 were physicians or engineers.[7]

But there are plenty who do return home for a variety of reasons. This study explored the experience of 49 such Indians and attempted to learn more about the process of readjustment for this population and to understand some of the factors that affect this process and make it more or less easy to readjust. Because the interviews were open-ended, this research focussed on an in-depth investigation of individual re-entry experiences rather than on specific factors that could be expected to have some bearing on the ease or difficulty of the readjustment.

In this group of 49, several remembered no trouble whatsoever in their re-entry experience, or had been able to cope so easily with the annoyances and minor inconveniences they faced that they can be seen as having no readjustment difficulty. Typical comments from this group were: "It took a little while to get used to the crowds, but otherwise I had no problem." or "It was not so difficult to return; after all, I'd lived in India for 22 years and only lived in America for two years." One or two of those interviewed seemed to take their easy readjustment for granted, and were at a loss to identify any problems they might have had.[8]

Yet most (35 or more) of those interviewed experienced some level of stress or difficulty after their re-entry, with problems ranging from initial anxiety about getting a job or a certain shock at the crowded conditions, pollution, or the frustrations of power and telephone outages, to an intense period of depression and alienation faced by two or three students upon their return. The most intense problems seemed to occur in the first few months to a year after return, but a few who were back in India for 4 or 5 years were still having a difficult time, while a couple of students who were back for less than a year seemed quite comfortable with their lives in India.

Twelve of those interviewed specifically mentioned that they "think about going back" to the U.S., or are considering some plans to go to the U.S. or another country for work or, more often, for further studies. At least one of these has already returned to the U.S. for more studies. These were usually students who had faced a challenging re-entry and who were not satisfied with the range of options available to them (and their children) in India.

It is important to distinguish between an easy readjustment and "successful" re-entry, since the ease of readjustment does not reflect the extent of students' intercultural learning, their effectiveness on the job, their integration in their society and family, or their level of responsibility in their community. In terms of intercultural learning, an often-used model of the readjustment process suggests that those who "revert" to their home culture tend to have few problems in their adjustment but may not have learned much in terms of the type of growth and development that can be expected from having lived sometime in another culture. On the other hand, those who become "alienated" by their own culture and try to live a foreign lifestyle within their own culture are likely to find re-entry a very difficult experience, but again have not taken advantage of the opportunity for learning that the re-entry experience can provide. Those who are able to "integrate" the experience abroad into their life back home are seen in this model as those who learn the most from the international experience. Typically, this is not an easy experience either.

The readjustment of Indian students is a complex process that is affected by a wide variety of variables. The research method used in this investigation was a naturalistic inquiry in which 49 individuals in four cities were interviewed in depth in loosely structured interviews that ranged from about 45 minutes to over 2 hours. Those interviewed were asked a few facts about their college or university and the degree they pursued as well as their general impressions of this experience and their adjustment process in the U.S. They were then asked to talk about their experiences in coming home with a series of opening questions focussing on how they had changed, how things in India had changed, what they

found surprising or difficult on their return, what they liked about being home, and how they dealt with any problems they identified in readjusting to India.

Efforts were made to get as diverse a group as possible. While the opportunity to study in the United States automatically limits this research to those who come from higher educational and social levels, the sample of individuals interviewed is otherwise quite varied. A near equal number of males and females from four cities were interviewed. They studied a variety of subjects in the U.S., where they remained anywhere from one year up to 17 years. They attended colleges, universities, and special professional institutions of varying sizes and locations.

In using in-depth interviews as the main source of information, this research was able to look at diverse outcomes in the re-entry process as well as the normal complex circumstances that tend to characterize peoples' lives, decisions, and relationships, and which have implications for both the ease of the readjustment and the extent of intercultural integration that is possible. In the next section some profiles of returned students are discussed illustrating the very different re-entry experiences and the circumstances that faced five of these students, whose names have been changed here.

Profile 1: Rupa

Rupa did her graduate work at a large Midwestern university where her husband also was a student. Living close to campus in married student housing, they made many friends from many countries and became active in the student life. Each summer they returned to India for a couple of months. At some point, they decided to return to India, largely because the husband's father was not in good health. That summer when they returned for a visit, the husband spent some time looking for employment and received a very good offer with a well-known institute. Rupa also made some contacts, but she had not yet finished her degree. She took some time off from her studies to help her husband resettle in India, then she returned to the U.S.A. to finish her Ph.D. By then she was pregnant, but this only seemed to make her more determined to finish her degree on time. She returned to India just one month prior to the birth of her child.

In her first months back in India, Rupa stayed at home with her baby, but also did some consulting work. She got a variety of job offers, and when her child was old enough, she took a post with a university, where she continues to work. Meanwhile, her husband's job gives him opportunity to travel; at the time of the interview, he was on a temporary assignment in the United States.

Rupa enjoys the academic environment. Although the issues in her field are very different in India and the U.S., she believes that her background in the U.S. has prepared her well for her work. Her style of teaching is one that gives students more freedom. She uses more open-ended questions and discussion in class, all of which are much less common in India than in the U.S. While she has the ability to use a more Western approach in the classroom, she does resent some of the constraints on her research. Specifically, she dislikes giving the credit for her work to more senior members of her team.

Rupa and her husband do not live in the same town as his or her parents, but she feels that family life is a major source of satisfaction in being back to India. She looks forward to visiting her parents and her in-laws each month. While the family would have preferred that Rupa and her husband lived in the same town, the couple made a conscious decision to live near the family, but not too near, so that they could have some independence. Rupa feels that she is perhaps more independent than most Indian women — for example, she takes her own decisions without asking advice from her mother-in-law — but is not sure whether it was her own personality, being in an academic setting, or having spent time in the U.S. that made her that way.

Rupa does not find it very hard to live in India and seems very unconcerned about what she calls the "minor physical inconveniences" that are part of being in a developing country. It helps, she notes, that she has some influential family connections. While she avoided wearing Indian clothing during her stay in the U.S., here she adjusts to the more tradi-

tional ways of her in-laws by always wearing a sari in their home, while she does not feel compelled to dress any special way when visiting her own parents. She has taken on part-time servants rather than live-in servants, and notes that she would sometimes rather do the work herself than bother training someone else to do it. For example, she prefers to cook for herself than hire and train a cook.

Discussion:

What makes Rupa's readjustment easy is the ability to make significant choices in her life, including where she will live and work. Her academic ability and family connections have paved the way for her to have certain privileges and opportunities that others in India do not have. Perhaps because she recognizes her privileges, she is willing to make a number of small concessions, such as wearing a sari at the in-laws and, perhaps a not-so-small one, avoiding conflict at her university by allowing senior people to take credit for her work.

Those who have ample freedom to make choices in India may be those most likely to return after studying in the U.S. They also tend to be among those who are able to make the easiest readjustments. As in Rupa's case, being offered jobs and having the luxury to select the best one not only removes some of the anxiety around job hunting, but immediately creates a situation in which the returned student can feel confident about the value of her newly-gained skills. Because she works in an academic environment rather than in industry or government, Rupa has more choices than many. She can chose her research topics and use a more western teaching style. In this type of work, she also has very limited need to deal with government bureaucracies and so does not face the frustrations that many of those in their own businesses may face.

It is typical that Rupa and her husband returned to India because of concerns about his father's health. At the age in which these students are typically coming to the United States, their parents are approaching an age at which health is an ongoing concern. Of the group of 49 Indians interviewed, six lost a parent either while they were gone or within a few months of their return home.

Despite their concern over the father's health, Rupa and her husband also have made the choice not to live with his parents and even to take jobs and live in another city so that they can be close but not too close. They travel frequently to visit both parents, spending every holiday in their hometown. Rupa says she loves being back in India so she can be close to her parents and in-laws, but the choice they have made allows them the kind of independence that most couples in the United States expect.

Profile 2: Amit

Amit spent almost nine years in the United States, living in three different states while working on advanced degrees in engineering. After his arranged marriage, he brought his wife to stay with him in the United States for the last two years. He depended on the funding he received from the universities he attended as well as a research post he was offered. But before he could complete his doctorate, the university cut his funding for reasons that are still unclear to him. The best solution seemed to be to return to India with his wife, though he still hopes and plans to return to the U.S. to complete his work at that or another university.

Amit saw himself as only temporarily home, and this seemed to make it more difficult to readjust. He did not try to find work for several months while he looked into getting his university funding back. In terms of his finances, Amit did not have to worry much, since his parents had property where he could live and his wife, a professional woman, found work immediately upon their return. Yet he admitted that is was "not good psychologically to be unemployed." When he began to look for work, he was depressed and disappointed in what he saw. At most employers there was inadequate equipment for the kind of work he wanted to do. Also, among the employees, there seemed to be little actual work being done. He would have to start at the bottom of the career ladder. All this was very disillusioning, but he gradually adjusted his expectations. As he said, "When you

have been in a brightly lighted place, a covered place looks dark at first, but your eyes adjust after a while."

Some of the students who worked for a time in India before they went to the U.S. felt that the work experience gave them more realistic expectations which made their readjustment easier. Amit had worked in another part of India and lived alone for almost ten years before he went abroad to study, and he also felt this gave him a useful reference point. While he was in the United States, he had continually tackled his engineering research by thinking, "How can I improve the situation of technology in India? How can I bring back this information to use in India?" Now that he has found work in a company he likes, he is doing just this: bringing to India the useful skills and information he learned in the U.S.

Yet his sense of accomplishment is mixed. He feels for many reasons that India has a brighter future in industry than the U.S., but he is frustrated by the problems of disarray in the infrastructure and labor force. He tries to adopt the quick decision-making process that he learned in the U.S., but believes that it is generally hard for Indians to make decisions, due to years of colonial dependence.

Though he does not live with his parents, it is important for Amit to be close by in case of an emergency in the family. Amit and his wife have made the best of the lengthy commuting pattern into which they have been forced as a result of their jobs. They are managing to spend a considerable amount of time together under the circumstances, and seem to have developed a good relationship.

However, he still wants to find a way for them to go back to the U.S. so he can complete his work and he worries about the problems he may have getting a visa.

Discussion:

Amit has adjusted to India and to his situation, but his "premature" return to India seems to have made it more difficult for him to accept wholeheartedly being in India. Although his low expectations for his career in India have been bettered in his present job, he remains oddly hopeful and cynical at the same time about the future of India's business and technology. He seems to have managed his adjustment both by having a sense of purpose in working to improve India's technology, and also by making plans to resume his studies in the U.S.

While most of the students in this research did finish their degrees, three of the five who did not complete the final degree they originally sought — for whatever reason — felt some sense of frustration about being home.

Previous research by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) found that national pride and service to India was the most frequently mentioned that Indian students gave for returning home.[9] This also was frequently mentioned in this study, but as the case of Amit shows, even in wanting to be of service to India, many of these returned students face frustrations in trying to work and participate in making India a better place. While some have found the niche where they believe they can make a difference, others are still searching, or are disappointed when change comes too slowly to India.

Like Rupa and many others in this research, Amit feels a new sense of responsibility for his parents, who seem old to him now and in potential need of assistance from him. Many, many others talked about wanting to be there for their parents who were still healthy, but at 60+ were seen as approaching old age.

Profile 3: Uma

Uma spent two years in the U.S. getting a masters degree in a liberal arts field that she believed would supply her with useful skills in her chosen career. At her U.S. university, she felt a tremendous amount of support from her faculty advisor, and noted that the foreign students were well integrated into the social life of the department. She was pushed to work hard in her discipline, but it was satisfying. Best of all, she had the opportunity to teach undergraduates. In general, she felt accepted and comfortable in the U.S.

Before she left to return home, one of her professors told Uma that it would be difficult for her to readjust to India because she had changed so much in that two years.

Not back in India a year yet, Uma is thinking about going back to the U.S. "I didn't think it would be this bad," she complained. She doesn't like the atmosphere of the business firms here. Little things she might not have noticed before she went to the U.S. now strike her as difficult. She has not been able to find a job, though she does get interviews. Potential employers are looking for experience rather than liberal arts degrees, and many do not recognize the value of her studies. Her father is either unable or unwilling to assist her with family contacts and capital to start her own business.

Superficially she fits in with her friends, but most of them are getting married and have different priorities. She wants to do something for herself before marriage. In the U.S., she became used to living alone and independently. Here, she lives under her family's supervision as well as the social pressure of the community that forces her to stay in line and avoid "talk" that might make it hard for her to find a husband. She wishes she could live without these restrictions, but she recognizes that her behavior will always have implications for her parents in Indian society, and she cares too much about her parents to defy the conventions she dislikes.

Discussion:

Uma's re-entry experience is a difficult one right now, but she has support and a number of coping strategies that are helping her in this process. First, her family provides important support, despite the fact that some of her readjustment problems concern readjusting to family supervision. Uma finds it quite helpful at times to talk frankly with her parents about how she is feeling. They don't always agree with her, but they accept her disagreement and are understanding. Second, she is exploring new types of career plans — a sort of contingency planning if she is unable to land a job in the field of her choice. Third, she recognizes the ups and downs of her readjustment process, and although she is often confused about what she wants to do, she reminds herself of the feeling she had when she first arrived in the U.S. Her problems then seemed so big that she wondered if she could manage. Now, those problems seem so minor, and she thinks that in time her current problems will also fade away.

* * * * *

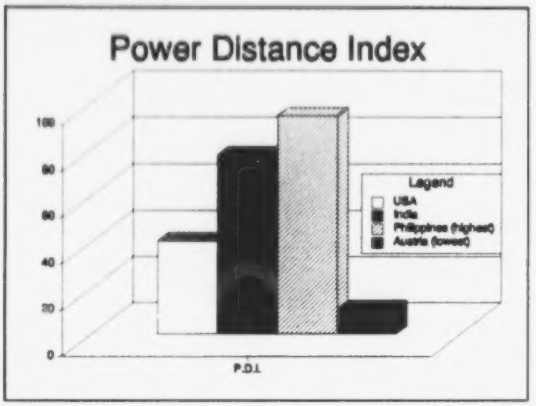
Some of the transitions these returned students face are not related as much to the cultural differences between India and the United States as to the economic differences between the societies. There are also other important transitions students face at the time of their return that relate to such things as their age and their changing roles and responsibilities in their families. Many commented that the transition from student life to work life was probably more difficult than the cultural transition from the U.S. to India. This may be especially true for those who had not worked before going to the U.S.

Students who face a difficult re-entry period may be dealing with multiple adjustments in many aspects of their lives. For most, some transitions will be positive and welcome changes. Other changes will represent a sometimes tremendous personal loss. In all this, however, the cultural transition is a powerful influence behind the way the returned students face the whole array of other adjustments they have to make.

Some of the most profound changes the students have made in the course of their studies in the United States concern their personal values. In spite of the variety of experiences represented in this sample, a common issue that runs through the re-entry experience of all three is a need to deal with their own values and expectations that are apparently not very "Indian" as they experience their individual family and work environments. Though they acknowledge these conflicts and contradictions, many of the returned students are reluctant to attribute the source of their values and expectations to the fact that they had lived in the United States. Instead, they see themselves as the type of person who would hold these values in any case. While it could be argued that this in itself is a U.S. cultural characteristic —

that is, Americans might also be unlikely to attribute their values to the fact that they live in the U.S. — it is also true that as part of a large and very diverse society, Indians hold a range of values and expectations that are often at odds with other "Indian" conventions and norms. In broad terms, it is also true that India and the U.S., despite their dramatically different cultures, do have some values in common.

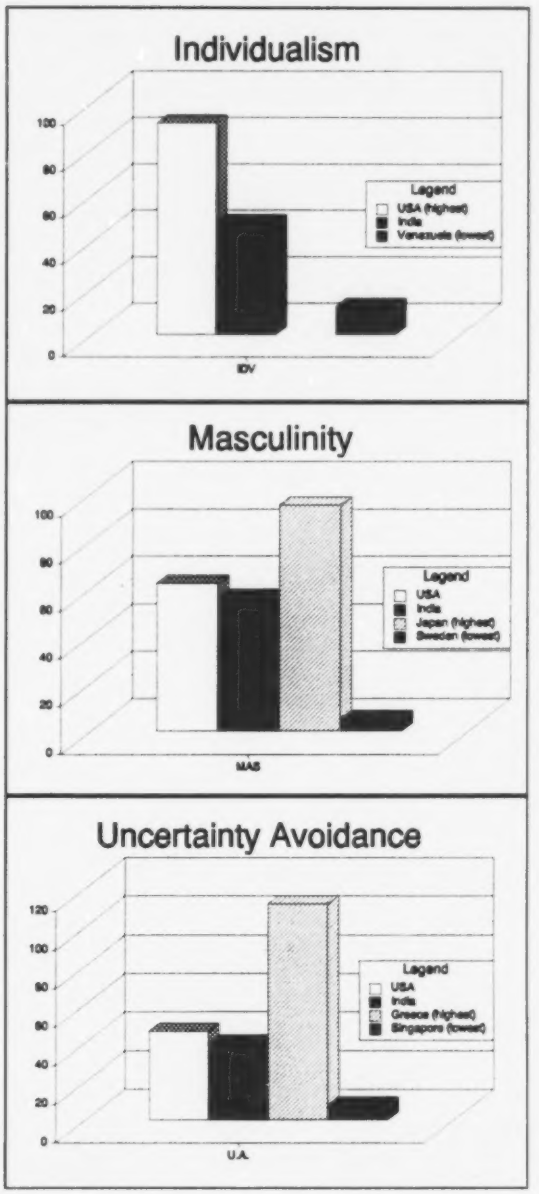
No one has made greater efforts to measure cultural differences than Geert Hofstede, whose four dimensions of culture are widely known and recognized in the intercultural field.[10] If we compare the measurements of U.S. and Indian workplace values according to Hofstede's dimensions, we can see that the largest contradictions are in the areas Hofstede calls "Power Distance" and "Individualism." (See graphs below. Highest and lowest scoring countries for each dimension are shown for contrast.)



Power Distance Index

"What is most important for me and my department is not what I do or achieve for the company, but whether the Master's (i.e., an owner of the firm) favor is bestowed on me. . . This I have achieved by saying "yes" to everything the Master says or does . . . [T]o contradict him is to look for another job. . . . I left my freedom of thought in Boston."

a senior Indian executive with a
Ph.D. from a U.S. university,
as quoted in Hofstede



Low Power Distance cultures (compare to USA)	High Power Distance cultures (compare to India)
parents put less value on children's obedience	parents put high value on children's obedience
students put high value on independence	students put high value on conformity
stronger perceived work ethic; strong disbelief that people dislike work	weaker perceived work ethic; more frequent belief that people dislike work
employees less afraid of disagreeing with their boss	employees fear to disagree with their boss
employees show more cooperativeness	employees reluctant to trust each other
students have positive associations with power and wealth	students have negative associations with power and wealth
inequality in society should be minimized	there should be an order of inequality in this world in which everyone has his rightful place; high and low are protected by this order
subordinates/superiors are people like me	subordinates/superiors are of a different kind than me
powerful people should try to look less powerful than they are	powerful people should try to look as powerful as possible
latent harmony between the powerful and the powerless	latent conflict between the powerful and the powerless

Individualism Index

Low IDV cultures (collectivist, compare to India)	High IDV cultures (individualist, compare to USA)
emotional dependence on company	emotional independence on company
large company attractive	small company attractive
more importance attached to training and use of skills in jobs	more importance attached to freedom and challenge in jobs
identity is based in the social system	identity is based in the individual
managers rate having security in their position more important	managers rate having autonomy more important
group decisions considered better than individual decisions	individual decisions are considered better than group decisions
duty in life appeals to students	enjoyment in life appeals to students
individual initiative is socially frowned upon; fatalism	individual initiative is socially encouraged
more years of schooling needed to do a given job	fewer years of schooling needed to do a given job
students consider it less socially acceptable to claim pursuing their own ends without minding others	students consider it socially acceptable to claim pursuing their own ends without minding others

Differences along these dimensions may have made it harder for the Indians to adjust to the U.S. in the first place, but some of these values appealed to them, and they took them on as their own. Upon returning to India, students found that these new values now clashed with their environment. Amit, for example, wants to use a U.S. style of decision-making on the job and Rupa wants to receive credit for her own work.

The returned students were all asked about the changes they felt they had made in themselves as a result of their sojourn in the United States. In terms of changed values, their responses are categorized in the table opposite on page 12. Many of these changes directly correspond to the predicted differences in culture along the Individualism and Power Distance dimensions identified by Hofstede.

Returned Indian students tend to show a change in values toward the direction of greater Individualism and lower Power Distance, especially in those values related to work, which was the focus of Hofstede's research. Not surprisingly, many of the returned students reported feelings of frustration in their work in just these areas. These discrepancies in values also turn up in their family lives, a context which for the Indian students are very much part of their own identities. Situations at work or with anonymous bureaucracies may be frustrating, but the Indian student does not risk a loss of self in fighting to change these situations. At home and among family, the differences are more likely to lead to self-doubt. Returned students facing these values conflicts at home are less likely to be sure of their position.

Most Commonly Mentioned Changes in Values:

Personal development (25)
- more confident
- more mature
- greater appreciation for life
- more self-aware
- more independent
- tougher, less sensitive
- more responsible
- more forthright, less secretive
- more fair, equitable

Increased appreciation for tolerance among people (11)
- More tolerant of other ethnic groups
- more bothered by caste system
- less parochial
- more bothered by stereotypes

Changed patterns of work behavior and life style (10)
- less formal
- more prompt, and time-conscious
- more critical of Indian inefficiency
- more disciplined
- more dedicated to work
- learned ideal of voluntarism
- prompt decision making
- more materialistic

Changed political outlook (10)
- more conservative
- more radical
- more feminist
- more knowledgeable
- more active

Intellectual development (6)
Changed pattern of male/female relationships (4)
More used to being alone, preference for living alone (3)
Change in interests (3)
Changed attitude about family life (3)
Increased, more realistic understanding of U.S.A. (3)
Decline in religious participation (2)

The need to balance their new needs for independence or privacy and perhaps a new sense of feminism, with their identity within the family can be challenging.

Profile 4: Amrita

When Amrita left for the U.S., her parents were going though a "bad patch." Being away from home increased her ties to her family, as well as her ties to India. She realized that she could not live with the values in the U.S. and could not be comfortable with her family so far away. "Americans don't have the same urge to be with their parents," she notes.

However, she has changed. Seeing how social security and welfare operated in the U.S. has turned her against the idea of giving any subsidies that have the effect of making people not feel responsible for their actions. A case in point is the abortion issue, she says. People must assume responsibility for their actions and not just have the government take care of it for them. She's also more aware of the problems in India, and more likely to take the initiative to change things. Now, if the telephone isn't working, for example, she is likely to go to the office and demand service. She's more likely to question her doctor during a physical exam; right now she's pregnant. She wants information rather than instructions and she wants to make up her own mind. She feels good about this change. She's finding that she does wield a bit of power when she complains about her phone; and the doctor respects her need for information and is willing to take time to answer her questions rather than just telling her what to do.

But Amrita isn't out to change everything about life in India. As a married woman, she recognizes that she has to give more in marriage. For example, she agreed to an arranged marriage and lives in a joint family with her husband's mother. She likes her mother-in-law, who is also a professional woman and recognizes Amrita's professional aspirations, but still she is expected to dress appropriately, join in the necessary socializing and hostessing that will advance her husband's career, and in general put the family first. "It's tough," she says, and wonders why it is she who always has to adjust so much. But she knows if she doesn't go along with the expected norm, she risks alienation. She was brought up never to hurt or say "no" to her elders because they might not be there tomorrow. There is a tremendous emotional pressure to keep parents and elders happy. Amrita does this to a certain extent because of love and to a certain extent because it is her duty.

She wants to maintain peace at home and avoid tension, but she will only go so far, she says. She must keep a balance; she must hold on to her basic values.

Discussion:

Perhaps more than any other returned student, Amrita's story illustrates the attraction of contradictory cultural values and the difficulty in finding a comfortable balance. Because she can feel good about some of the changes she has made and because of the prerogative she earned in some areas, she is somewhat more willing to tolerate the fact that she is the one who needs to accede to her husband, to her in-laws, and to the society in so many other areas. While she is ready to demand her rights when requesting telephone service or at the doctor's office, in the context of the family she also has responsibilities as well as rights. Her needs are not the only needs and perhaps, she might agree, hers are not always the most important needs in the family. She is also strongly attracted to the values represented by the Indian family and does not want to risk this important part of her life by trying to make too many demands or changes within the family context.

But she knows that the balance is not even that more often than her husband it is she who must make concessions. She is even willing to accept this inequality, but not at the loss of her integrity. There is some point where her own values are too important to compromise, as she explained. But where that balance point lies is probably not always clear to Amrita. When are her basic values threatened by the needs and demands of her family? And when are her own priorities "unreasonable" or not worth risking family relationships to maintain? Amrita's time in

the United States may have prompted her to pose these questions more often, but these may also be common issues for married Indian women who have professional careers. Certainly they are common concerns for many American women.

Profile 5: Shanti

After completing her Ph.D. in English at an Ivy League school, Shanti took a lectureship at a California university, hoping to advance her career. California was like a dream place for her. The scenery was incredible, the climate was wonderful, everyone wants to be in California. But she was unhappy. She had the feeling that because everyone wants to be in California, if she couldn't be happy here, she should not be happy anywhere else. She kept asking herself why she was so unhappy in the midst of all this beauty. The answer became a little clearer after her parents visited her. "I felt that really what I was doing was interacting with my car and my personal computer. These were really the center of my existence," she explained. "I had just gotten unused to interacting with people; and even though I'd gotten unused to it, I still missed it a lot." It was at this point that she felt completely homesick, or as she put it, had a case of "value sickness." She noted that it wasn't so much that she missed her parents and family members as individuals, but she missed the Indian value system and the Indian way of life, which is very people-oriented. "Just a simple example, we keep a maid rather than a washing machine or a vacuum cleaner. Of course, you could say that that's exploitation, but then the thing is that we have a very sort of, not intimate but very personalized relationship with our maid. . . . When my maid comes she chatters about her family and I help her with woolens, and she talks about her son's education and stuff like that. Even when you buy vegetables you talk to the person. So even living alone you can have all these levels of human interaction, which I wasn't getting there. I felt like I was living in a sort of vacuum, where even if I wanted to meet with what I would call in those terms a close friend, I'd have to make an appointment for lunch. You can't drop in at people's places, or at least I didn't feel comfortable doing that. So it would be: Are you free for lunch next Friday afternoon? and then they would say, well yes, but only for 45 minutes. . . . because I have all these things to do in the afternoon. After a while it got a little too much."

Now that she's returned to India, she no longer has the feeling that life is bleak. She felt that in America she "had to be satisfied with relatively superficial things. Happiness depended on things like your bank balance. Here I'm happy, I'm more relaxed. I just like being an Indian in India." Though she found herself isolated living as a single woman in India before her marriage, there were still things in which she found satisfaction. "Indians aren't always looking out for number 1. There's no 'ivory tower' for academics in India. You're constantly in touch with a very grim reality. You can't isolate yourself from poverty, or from sickness or death, and I think that's invigorating in a way. You can't stay blind. In America you can switch off the evening news. Here you can't do that."

Shanti wanted to have children, and wanted a life mate. Since she did not find a "love marriage" she decided to stop waiting for Mr. Right and go with an arranged marriage. When she met the man who became her husband, she saw in him the same mentality that she had before she left for the States: that there are really certain things that matter and take priority over oneself. "I associate it with the Indian point of view that living abroad I'd missed. It was something I'd seen in my parents and my grandparents. That there were larger units than the self that matter."

Discussion:

The extreme individualism of the United States clearly does not appeal to someone like Shanti, who places a heavy importance on human interaction and personal relationships. Yet she is one of the few women surveyed who had lived alone in India before her marriage, having deliberately chosen to live in another city than her parents. It seems that Shanti's value for recognizing the importance of "units larger than the self" is not based on her dependence on other people or a constant need for companionship.

It is more a spiritual and philosophical need that rejects the "me first" attitude she felt in the U.S.

Shanti was happy to be back in India even though her career options were disappointing and even though some aspects of Indian society made it difficult for her to live alone as a woman. Shanti's sense of relief and comfort at being home again, in the context of her own deeply held values, is a common theme among the returned students. Even among those who participated fully in American life were many who were critical of the attitudes and values they found within the American family, where they note that divorce is widespread, children are left on their own at a very early age, and old people are isolated from their children and grandchildren. Preferring the context of Indian values makes the readjustment somewhat easier, but this is not a case of simply reverting to a previous lifestyle. Shanti and others like her have learned through living in the United States how essential their own cultural values are to them. Rather than passively accepting the cultural norms, they have actively embraced them and made them their own.

* * * * *

The two major arenas of re-entry adjustment found in this study were in the family and at work. To a lesser extent, the society as a whole and the local community also provided a context for re-entry conflict, perhaps most among those who felt alienated because of living in a city where they did not belong to the main cultural or linguistic group.[11] These various realms of adjustment are explored in more depth below. Along with these general contexts of re-entry adjustment, the study also identified some variables in the attitudes and skills of those returning that seem to ease adjustment or make it more difficult. These include: (1) the extent to which students have clear goals and the confidence to achieve them, (2) the extent to which students feel a sense of belonging in India, and (3) the ability of students to assume certain attitudes and outlooks or use specific coping skills and strategies to ease readjustment problems.

Returning to Mutual Dependence in the Family

With Parents

One of the principal differences that most Indian students noted between the U.S. and India is in the role and structure of the family. While American young adults typically move away from their families and emphasize their personal and economic independence from their parents, the Indian young adults interviewed in this study often missed their parents terribly while gone, telephoning them on the average of every two or three weeks. As Amrita explained it, "Americans just don't have the same urge to be with their parents as Indians do." The young adult in Indian society is drawn to be with his or her parents and to think about them all the time. Those who had studied in America did not tend to lose this urge.

Not surprisingly, for many of these students, coming home to the family was largely a positive experience. Twenty of those interviewed emphasized the family ties that brought them back home. Living in an Indian family involves a mutual dependence between members and assuming an identity as part of a whole: a larger sense of "we" than of "me." For many of the returning students, like Shanti, this was exactly what they missed in the United States, and what they were so eager to have again. Though two or three admitted that they returned home out of a sense of duty toward their families, or even a commitment they made to their parents when they left for the U.S., most of the students talked about their very close-knit family and how they wanted to be back with them. One woman, who had missed her family intensely, commented that she realized that she wanted to spend every available minute with her family.

It is interesting that three or four of the younger students reported that they returned from the United States feeling exhausted, and found it especially comforting to be able to give up their burdens to their family and simply relax for a while. With no pressure to contribute any income to the family, no need to cook or clean for oneself, and never a sense of being alone, the Indian family provided them with a sense of comfort and security that they wanted. Eleven returned students commented specifically that

they needed and appreciated the support of their parents as they made the transition from the life of a student in the U.S. to the working life of an adult in India, and that they still depend on the emotional support from their parents.

What sort of support can Indians expect from their parents? While some of the students needed the financial support when they returned, others were quick to point out that they would be able to manage financially on their own. What seemed to be essential for about 80% of the students who returned to live with their parents was the total emotional support they get from their parents. They know that there is always someone there, with time to look after them. In their family their needs will all be met, and they will not carry alone the burden of making decisions. As one person said, "The family wipes out most of the malices in coming home." And another: "They will support you against the rest of the world." More concretely, family support also means a steady supply of company and conversation. It means not needing to face any problem — even a minor one — alone. If the family has money, a house, a car, servants, or whatever, it means that everyone in the family has access to these resources as they need them.

At least nine of those interviewed specifically mentioned the importance of the support they received from their parents as being a help in their readjustment process. This confirms the research of Judith Martin, who found that relationships with parents improved after a sojourn abroad, and that parents provided useful support for the readjustment process.[12] This does not mean that there were no conflicts between these students and their parents; in some cases the students discovered the strength of their parents love and support because of conflicts between them. One man found that his parents would be constantly supporting even when he brought home a wife they had not chosen, or when he disagreed or even offended them. Recognizing their unconditional support made him feel more strongly attached to his parents. Uma found comfort in talking over her readjustment difficulties with her parents even though some of her adjustment problems concerned living with her parents again.

Given the age of the students and their parents, it may be expected that several returning students faced some major family event shortly after their return. Six students faced the death of one of their parents while they were abroad or within months after their return. Another rushed home because his father had been seriously injured. For two of the returning students, re-entry to India was clouded with issues that led to the break-up of their marriage. Two became mothers very soon after their return and one rejoined her very young son whom she had left with her parents during her time in the U.S.A., which meant that for them, adjustment to motherhood was more an issue than the re-entry to India.

Assuming greater family responsibilities added to the readjustment pressure for these students, for others who had married while abroad or shortly after returning, and even for some of the single students who felt a new need to look after aging parents. There was frequently the sense that the parents were growing older and the son especially should be there to provide social and emotional security for his parents.[13] But the family responsibility was not seen as a unwelcome burden in many cases as much as it was seen as the fulfillment of a desirable commitment. Some of the students (typically female) spoke of their personal desire and intention to repay their parents for the support they had received throughout their lives. There were statements from some students to the effect that their own parents were more liberal than most Indian parents, or respected their freedom more than most. These students returned to their families out of love and attraction for their parents rather than from any parental pressure or sense of duty. For some, though, the motivating factor would better be described as a duty one must assume. Fulfilling this family obligation is important for the students, and seems on the whole to outweigh any individual preference they might have. Some returned home precisely because of the pressure of this duty. This was especially true of those who were their parents' only son, but daughters felt it as well. As one person explained, the sense that she was not taking care of her parents when they needed her would have left her unfulfilled in the U.S., even though her own career goals would be better met there. Those who returned home mostly because of parental pressure often seemed to have a less positive outlook on their future in India, and while they readjusted out of necessity, they were often dissatisfied in some way or another.

Gama and Pedersen's 1977 report of their study of 31 Brazilian returnees offered the hypotheses that women who returned to Brazil from the United States would have more difficulty adjusting to the restrictions of living with family than did men.[14] There is some support in the results of this research for the extension of this hypothesis to the return to India, though it may also be that women are more willing to talk about these problems than men, especially with a female interviewer. In looking directly at adjustment problems within the family, three men mentioned some difficulties in their adjustment to the family compared with seven women. For students living with their parents, these difficulties centered on the loss of the freedom to come and go out of the house without explaining every time, the restrictions against staying out late at night, and the loss of privacy. For women there were also some complaints about restrictions in their dress, a factor not so much in their own homes but in their in-laws' homes or on the job. Women with children of their own focussed on the adjustment issues of balancing family and career, or the difficulties of meeting the obligations to their parents while fulfilling their own needs.

In this sample, as one would expect, living with parents is the norm. Those who were not married generally were content with this arrangement. One young woman talked about treasuring these last few years living with her parents before she would leave them for marriage. Living at home again does imply some restrictions on one's freedom, especially when compared with the lifestyle they had known in the United States. While in the U.S. they had been able to come and go as they please, now they had to explain where they would be going, with whom, and so on. Students who had maintained their own apartments, driven with friends all over the U.S., and otherwise been fully capable of managing on their own now found parents who worried about them if they were out late. A couple of female students mentioned that their parents were worried about leaving them alone in the house. Students who felt a greater need for freedom or privacy found such restrictions difficult, and sometimes fought with their parents over these issues. Talking with parents seemed to help, both in terms of their understanding the need for restrictions ("They told me that they do this because they care about me and worry about me. If they didn't care about me I could come and go as I please" or "I used to think they had no right to question my behavior, but now I see that they only wanted an explanation") as well as in easing up the restrictions on their freedom ("I tell them that I think I'm old enough to know how to spend and manage my money, and they're beginning to understand.")

Although about six or seven men either lived alone or had at some point lived alone in India, a good majority of the men lived permanently with their parents as either single adult men or with their wives as part of a joint family. However, three men were living alone at the time of the interview. It is much more difficult for Indian women to live alone. Though three or four of the women, including Shanti, had lived alone in India before marriage, they also complained of the problems they faced in trying to do this. Others who might want to live alone relented and lived at home with their parents because they had no other options. Those who did not have stable careers with a firm that provides housing could not expect an easy time finding an apartment in a society that is suspicious of a woman if she does not want to live with her parents. Two women who had tried to live alone found landlords unwilling to rent to them, or refusing to let them install a telephone. The sense that their comings and goings would be watched carefully by the landlord and the neighbors also made the idea of living at home more appealing. Those interviewed also reported that a woman who might want to have her own apartment in the same town as her parents is also faced with the embarrassment this brings for her family, because everyone — relatives, neighbors, friends, and strangers — will assume that her choice to live alone reflects serious problems within the family.

A few of the single males surveyed lived alone, often because their job was in another city from that of their parents. Others, both male and female, planned to get their own places as soon as it would be economically feasible. Generally, these people valued a sense of individualism that is typical in the United States. This group also included some who had been in boarding school, and some who had lived in nuclear families rather than joint families as children, or whose fathers had jobs that caused the

family to move around quite often. Yet none of these factors is predictive of the desire to live alone.

Marriage and Family

Living in a joint or extended family was more common among the married returned students than living in a nuclear family, but not among the females interviewed, where the nuclear family was somewhat more typical. Five or six of the married women lived in nuclear families, while two or three, including Amrita, lived in a joint family. Two women were living with their children and their own parents. Among the men, at least 10 lived in joint families or in separate quarters in the same building as their parents. Only one of these mentioned any concerns about the loss of privacy in the joint family compared to what he had known in the U.S. For some, the sense that the American family was in trouble led them to be even more convinced of the value of the Indian joint family. For example, one man has delayed getting married because his parents are not in agreement with his choice of a bride and he does not want to split the family.

Three of the females interviewed talked at length about being in a joint family (or wanting to be in one). One was very enthusiastic about running the household with her mother-in-law and thought it was great fun being in a joint family. Amrita's adjustment within the joint family has been discussed, but she was generally satisfied with her choice to live with her in-laws. The third woman enjoyed and depended on the support provided from her in-laws and parents living in the same town, and noted that she would find it more convenient to live in a joint family if her husband would agree.

Young adults in India are expected to marry, though most of the single people interviewed were not as yet under particular pressure from their parents to get married. In a few cases, though the parents had begun efforts to find an appropriate spouse. Even if the process had not really begun, parents are concerned about marrying off their daughters, and this has an impact on her day-to-day life. For example, one woman was dismayed to discover that her parents were afraid to let her stay alone in the house because they assumed she would have late night parties in their absence, which would cause the neighbors to talk, and in turn ruin her chances of getting a good marriage.

Just under half of those interviewed are now or had been married. Most married after their return to India, but a number of these students lived in the United States with their spouses. The traditional arranged marriages are common for this group, but a significant number chose their own spouses, and several single students objected strongly to the idea of an arranged marriage. Conflicts between parents and students about marriage plans emerged in a couple of instances, but this is not a general problem for those interviewed, either because they are in general agreement with the notion of an arranged marriage or their parents accept the student's own choice. An example of the first is a woman who was comforted by the idea that her parents would help her find a suitable husband, since she didn't feel sure she would find someone on her own. The other situation is illustrated by a man who was delightfully surprised when his parents were so open to his choice of a bride. For him, the anticipated problems of bringing this wife home to live with his parents did not materialize, and the "whole thing worked out much better than I had even hoped."

Those who have made an arranged marriage, or who expect to, often noted how difficult it was for their American friends to understand this choice. Some argued strongly in favor of arranged marriages, believing that it is best to be neutral in one's choice of a spouse rather than influenced by physical attraction or another bias that may not have much bearing on future happiness. The woman mentioned above who wanted her parents' help in finding a spouse is one case that illustrates a positive outlook on arranged marriages. Shanti is another, even though she was romantically drawn to the idea of a "love marriage," when this didn't come about she was ready to "try her luck" with an arranged marriage, since, as she pointed out, all the happy marriages she knew of were arranged marriages.

Since there is no conflict in these cases between the individual's choice and the norms of society, those open to the arranged marriage may also report having little difficulty in readapting generally. Having lived in the U.S. for some time did not make it more difficult for them to accept an arranged marriage. In fact, one woman noted that having been

on her own in the U.S., it was easier for her to adjust to marriage and leaving her parents' home. Nevertheless, there can be special adjustment issues concerned with the arranged marriage. One woman whose parents had begun looking for a husband for her was anxious about the process since, until she knew for sure where she and her so-far unidentified husband would live, it was difficult to plan her career. Another was annoyed by the "superstitions" of her parents, who were looking for a suitable boy with a compatible horoscope.

In Madras, the social environment seems to be more orthodox than in the other cities, and the role of caste is more prominent in the society. (In fact, no where else did anyone mention caste at all.) The issue of caste certainly affects marriage, since parents would tend to arrange for a marriage within the same caste, though some returnees seemed proud to have parents who were open to the idea of marrying someone outside their caste. Although caste is not mentioned in other cities, the communal feelings of parents are often a source of conflict for the returned students in all cities, especially when there is an issue of marriage involved. Many of the returned students had adopted an attitude of greater openness toward other religious groups and subcultures, causing conflict with their parents who held on to their stereotypes of various groups within India.

Work and Career

The Job Search

The ability to find satisfying work is an important step in easing the re-entry adjustment. Among the educated upper and middle classes in India, family connections are often the key to a start in business or professional life. Six of the returning students took jobs through family connections or the family business, and two joined a family professional practice. Three others began their own enterprises fairly quickly upon their return, often with family money. Finding positions in large companies is also frequently done though family connections. Students who have these kinds of connections are freed of much of the worries about employment that occupy other returning students. They are probably also the most likely to return to India.

In addition to the students who had the connections to get into business and professional practice, four of the students returned to the same (or nearly the same) job they had before they left India to go to the United States. This may be a reflection of the almost sacred quality of job security in India in that these people did not have to relinquish their posts to take advantage of study abroad opportunities. For most of the returning students, however, finding a job upon their return was a top priority even among those who had no immediate need for an income.

At least twelve of those looking for work described the experience as difficult, frustrating, or disappointing. Some of those most discouraged by the job hunt were those who felt that their academic work in the U.S. was not especially valued in the Indian job market. Two students in communications faced this problem, as did some in political science or policy studies whose studies had prepared them for a job in government, which could then not be obtained. Some of those interviewed were still unemployed, or temporarily employed but looking for work, even after a few years.

A number of those who found work were dissatisfied with their initial jobs; three of these had already switched to other, more satisfying jobs. When they compared their job with those they might have been able to get in the United States, several felt that they had made a compromise in their career for the sake of returning to India. Some were confused about what they wanted to do, and considered a return to the United States for more studies.

Despite this, others seemed to have found jobs without as much anxiety, though they may have worked very hard and just as long to find work. By having a clear idea about their career goals, a systematic plan for achieving them, and a sense of confidence in their ability to achieve these goals that was not shaken by initial set-backs, they minimized some of the stress in their job search and increased their chances for success. Some launched a job hunting campaign while they were in the United States. Others made job hunting trips during the summer vacations before they finished their degree, and were able to secure positions for themselves before they left the U.S. Even those in this group who did not

start the job search before returning were typically confident in their credentials. They also took a systematic approach to the job hunt, researched and targeted the businesses to which they would apply, and called on the various business contacts they had through family and friends.

A government program (the "Poole Program") funds temporary internships for returning students who are seeking permanent jobs. This program was a boon for about five of the students, giving them experience and an income while they sought permanent posts.

The few who almost immediately set up their own enterprises were now operating them successfully. The risk was well worth taking, but the responsibility they assumed was also greater. One returning student would have preferred a steady salary in a comfortable job, but was instead entrusted with the family's life savings and urged by his father to take the risk now to set up a business rather than later when he would have the additional responsibilities of a wife and children. The sense of creativity and the ability to be one's own boss and set the standards for the work environment seemed to be the main attractions to starting a business from scratch. Even more than those who assumed positions in their family businesses, these men seemed confident and optimistic about India's economic future.

The Work Culture and Environment

Many of those interviewed had relatively easy transitions to the work environment in India. Many felt that the fact that they had worked before going to the U.S. for studies gave them a more realistic picture of the work situation in India and made it easier for them to adjust. Those who did not have the experience of working in the U.S. also felt that this helped them adjust to the Indian workplace, since they had not felt the greater financial rewards of employment in the U.S. nor had they become used to the Western style of work. But these factors were not necessarily predictive of successful adjustment to the work environment. For a number of those interviewed, the strongest continuing readjustment issues were their frustrations in the work environment. This was true for those in business, in academics, and in professions.

The frustrations usually start with the telephones that are not dependable, the bureaucracy in the government that interferes with getting things done, and the general inefficiency that they feel exists in the office. Though many people in India may complain about these things, the returned students seemed to feel the frustration more acutely. "Once you've seen the light, you know what darkness is," was a typical comment. In Calcutta, these issues were the most obvious, but in every city, statements like these turned up:

> "Much more supervision of employees is needed here."
>
> "So many of the things you take for granted in the United States, like telephones that will always work, are not found here. So it's harder to get as much done."
>
> "In the U.S., even for a volunteer activity, when you ask someone to do a job, you can count on it's being done and done on time. Here you have to keep reminding people to do their work."

By the same token, some complained that their supervisors wanted to oversee every small thing that they did, and that they did not receive the individual credit for their work that they had in the United States. Office politics are seen as extremely important, and as interfering with getting the work done. This seemed as true of business as academic environments.

Another frustrating aspect of the work culture in India was what one person called the "it will do" attitude. Or, as another person explained, the concept of the job is more important than completing it perfectly. So if a typed letter has some errors in it, if a computer program does not work perfectly, if some wall paint is spilled on the floor, the general workplace culture, according to those interviewed, does not bother correcting these flaws. Those who described themselves as ambitious or who loved doing their work seemed to be particularly irritated or depressed by this attitude.

To minimize some of these frustrations, some students chose to work for multinational corporations where the environment might be more similar to that of a U.S. corporation. This group preferred what they saw as the relatively less hierarchic, more efficient, and more exciting work environment of the multinational corporation. Others found the environment of a research institute or a university post somewhat better in that it allowed them some creativity and freedom in their work. Those with their own company often tried to develop their own work culture within their firm, but at least one such person was still frustrated: "I can't change the whole system. Even if my business operates efficiently our hands are tied when others don't."

Why Did you Come Back?

Almost everyone agreed that they were often asked the question, "Why did you come back?" since the general perception in India is that anyone lucky enough to go to America would be silly to come back to India. This question tended to annoy the returned students, who saw both positive and negative aspects of the United States. Some found it difficult to convince their colleagues that things were not always perfect in the U.S. For example, a few students who were on campuses in rough inner-city neighborhoods were faced with disbelief when they described some of their concerns for safety and the conditions they faced there. Related to this was the reaction the returnees faced when they complained about something they found in India, such as pollution or traffic. They would be asked again, "Well, why didn't you stay in America if you don't like it here?" Though this type of reaction continued to bother some, most returnees began to care less and less how other people reacted.

More problematic was the fact that any new ideas the returnees might have would be viewed as something alien that wouldn't work in India and they would be reminded, "You're not in America anymore." Returnees found they needed to work twice as hard in many cases to convince people that their new ideas deserved attention. Similarly, they needed to work hard to counter the general impression held by many of their colleagues that they probably would sooner or later go back to the U.S. This made it difficult in some cases for the returnee to get a job or to advance in his or her career.

National Identity and Alienation

A Sense of Purpose

Those who came back with clear ideas about why they wanted to be back in India were often those who felt some sense of mission about their work and its need in India. Many students had specifically chosen research topics that related to the development needs of India and felt that they were making a contribution, however small, to the betterment of India. Some recalled a sense of responsibility or service toward India that had been instilled in them from their education and upbringing. Being able to do their part, whether on the job or through voluntary community service (a concept that may well have been learned in the U.S.) was important in helping them fit back into Indian society. Yet sometimes it was not so easy for them to find the outlet for their skills and to make the contribution that they wanted to make, especially if they studied in fields that are less common and not well understood in India — even when there may be a crying need for such a contribution. For these people, adjustment may seem harder while they are still trying to find a role for themselves.

Belonging in India

Some returned students presumed that they belonged in India regardless of anything else, and so immediately felt themselves to be part of Indian society. As one person said, "I will never have to apologize to anyone for living here," whereas as an immigrant to another country, he might at times be made to feel that he did not belong there. Some students decided to return home when they recognized that they belonged in India. "I suddenly realized that I like India," was a typical statement. Many reported feeling a sense of comfort and belonging that they could only have in India. This contrasted with a sense of loneliness and alienation that many students felt in the United States. "I felt as if I was only interacting with my car and my computer," was how Shanti put it when describing her idea of "value

sickness." Another student was deeply affected by Indira Gandhi's assassination, which made it suddenly seem very important to her to be doing her work in India rather than in the United States.

Some people also thought that in India they would have a better chance to make their mark in the world. For example, one person spoke of the greater confidence she felt in India to walk into offices, introduce herself as so-and-so's daughter, and ask for work. In the U.S., no one would know her family and she would be more unsure of how to dress, whom to meet, and what to say. A similar sentiment was expressed by the person who felt that his chances in India to become a C.E.O. were much better than in the U.S., where it would ultimately be difficult for an Indian to rise to the top. Another person commented that in the U.S. he would always be a second class citizen, while in India he is a first class citizen.

A few students did not have this sense of belonging in India. Sometimes this might be explained by the fact that the city in which they were now living was new to them, and not the hometown they left. Language is sometimes a barrier as well; some of those interviewed admitted that they were not fluent in the local language or were in any case more at home in English.

Friends

Though several returned students continued to be in close contact with friends from their childhood, a more common pattern was found, even among those students who returned to the same city they left, that their former circle of classmates was no longer around. In some instances, the friends also went to the United States and were still there, but some also moved to other cities in India. At the age of most of the students, their friends have married, and the single student finds this to be a barrier to the friendship. Generally, those friends are doing other things. In spite of this, only a few were concerned about the loss of the friends they had had before going to the United States. More often, they developed new friends whose experience, situation, and interests were better matched to their own.

Attitudes and Coping Strategies

Clear Goals and Confidence

Quite a number of students had very clear goals about their reasons for pursuing higher education in the U.S., with specific ideas concerning what they wanted to do upon their return. These students typically were extremely bright, motivated, and confident. They often worked very intensively while they were students, perhaps completing a two-year program in a year and a summer, or pushing quickly through a combined Masters and Ph.D. program. Some of them talked about the importance of planning for their career in India even before they left, and many had carefully researched their options in the U.S. with these plans in mind. This, they felt was important in easing their readjustment to India. Given the level of confidence and general ability of these students to succeed, it was not surprising to find them returning home fully confident of their ability to get a job, and turning down offers until the right one came along. The satisfaction of achieving their goals dominated their outlook and their re-entry experience.

On the other hand, some students who also had clearly defined goals for themselves had a severe blow to their confidence when they were not able to achieve the goals set. For example, this was the case for one student who did not get the position in the government that she sought and another who had been unable to convince potential employers of the value of her degree. These students had more difficulties in readjusting because of this and found themselves forced to explore other options for themselves, which might include returning to the U.S. for further studies.

Attitudes and Outlooks

Many people commented that Indians are used to accepting whatever comes, an attitude that tends to minimize frustration and disappointment. "You just accept it. It becomes normal." Most of the returnees also noted that their expectations about India were realistic; they knew India was not like the U.S. "I lived here for 23 years, and only two years in the U.S.," was typical of the way some people discussed their readjustment. This seemed to reflect a way of putting their experience into the context of

their whole life so far, and seemed to serve as a means of minimizing the adjustment issues, or suggesting why it was not difficult at all for them to readjust.

Other people commented that they just tried to forget about their U.S. experiences that had no relevance in India. "I don't question too much how things ought to be." In this way, they adjusted their expectations to match what they have and simply get on with life. Some people talked about the time when they first returned as one spent trying to fight situations they disliked, but gradually they see the futility of their protests, and accept, ignore, or find some small niche in which they can make changes. The pattern of re-entry these students followed was most like reverting to their old cultural norms.

While a few people openly admitted being materialistic and missing the standard of living available in the U.S., most of those interviewed saw themselves as people for whom such material things are not especially important. "These are just small things that are easy to get used to." On the other hand, all of these students have an adequately high standard of living in their own homes, which may in some cases be as good or better than what they could hope to attain in the United States. One person suggested that I ask people if they would rather be rich in India or the United States. She would bet that it would always be preferable to be rich in India.

Some Strategies for Coping

Observing and Listening

Not surprisingly, the very same skills that helped some of these students adjust to the U.S. also came into play in helping them readjust to India. They were able to observe the behavior of those around them and take their cues. One woman talked about making a conscious effort to fit in. For her, this meant among other things that she would wear a very modest sari to work rather than a salwar and kurta, since she noticed that this type of dress was expected of someone in her position, though no one would have commented on her style of dress. For another woman, making an effort to fit in meant that she avoided boring her friends with stories about the U.S., and paid attention to what they had to talk about. Another person talked about the frustrations he faced trying to cash a check at the bank. But he looked around him at the bank and discovered that other people were calmly accepting the procedures, and not getting angry or discouraged at the length of time it took. This "rubbed off" as he put it, so that eventually he could also remain calm.

Adopting Desirable Aspects of U.S. Culture

For some students, many aspects of American culture are worth bringing back to India. These included the level of trust given to employees, the ability to make decisions quickly, a sense of pride in doing work well, a more forthright approach to human relationships, a sense that merit is rewarded, a more efficient work and political environment, and the ability of the individual to take initiative. But it was often smaller things that could be adopted, such as trying to use one's time more efficiently. One person talked about "optimizing" his time. When he first returned he used to be very frustrated when he was kept waiting. Now he employs various strategies to minimize his waiting time, such as being more specific about an appointment time and then reconfirming it. Those with their own companies often tried to bring the values of a more efficient workplace into their firms. Those in academic settings often talked about using a discussion-oriented approach to teaching, and trying to establish a different type of relationship with their students.

Though many of those questioned would like to see many of the more positive U.S. values practiced in Indian society, no one expected things to change overnight, and many commented that in some respects conditions are now much worse in India than they were in the early 1980s. The question for many returnees was to find a balance.

Finding a Balance

The theme of balancing the security one has, whether in terms of job, family, or social relations, with the possibility of greater rewards if some risks are taken, emerged again and again as a theme of discussion. Which battles do they choose to fight? This is an interesting question for further research, one that was highlighted in the profile of Amrita.

Smooth relations within the family clearly take the first position in finding a balance not only for Amrita but for a good number of those interviewed, and often keeps people conforming to the norms of society. As Uma explained, it is important to stay within the "nice girl" image, since if she steps out of what is considered normal, not only would she suffer isolation from the rest of society but her parents also would suffer. "It's easier if you don't care about your parents and elders." The risk of hurting parents is generally too great. On the other hand, the man who at first worried that his parents would be upset that he had chosen his own wife has discovered again and again that his parents are on his side even when he disagrees with them. This experience has in fact strengthened his attachment to his parents.

On another front is a person who hopes eventually to get into politics, but wonders if he will be able to take the risk of leaving his comfortable job. To some extent, the experience in the U.S. may make people more open to taking certain types of risk, but job security is extremely important in India and it is difficult to give up such a job. One person did take an enormous risk and gave up his job shortly after his return to India even though he did not have much to fall back on. It may be that his experience in the U.S. contributed to the sense of confidence he had in his ability to get another more satisfactory job, which he was able to do. Another such risk was taken by a returnee who insisted that his supervisor give him more authority to do his work independently. This risk was also rewarded.

Conclusion

One of the benefits of a naturalistic research is its ability to bring to light various aspects of individual experiences that complicate, intensify, or ease the cross-cultural readjustment process. Particularly striking in this study was the prominence of new family responsibilities in the re-entry process, both in conjunction with the aging, poor health, or death of the parents of these students as well as their own marriages and child-bearing. The economic reality of India and its poorly developed infrastructure were not surprising sources of frustration for many of the students, however, their own economic standing and position in society often mitigated the worst frustrations. Many were very optimistic about India's (and their own) economic future.

From an intercultural perspective, the research found that the students' values changed along predictable lines, moving toward greater independence and less differentiation of power among social groups. Especially when they first returned, the Indian students were impatient with bureaucratic red tape and inefficiency and frustrated by the work attitudes they often found on the job. They also were more bothered by communal differences and the intolerance shown by some Indians (especially in their own families) toward others. They usually attributed their own larger tolerance for others to their positive exposure to different groups of people in the U.S.A., but also to their own experience of being a foreigner and, at times, the object of racial hatred.

The two most prominent arenas in which the cultural values conflict was played out were in the family and at work, but the larger society was also a place where they found conflicts in values, and where they sometimes felt a sense of alienation. The workplace brought its share of frustrations and challenges for these students, and many resigned themselves to a lower level of job satisfaction than they believed they would have had if they remained in the U.S.A. Finding meaningful employment was an initial concern for most of these students, and this may be the area in which programs like the Poole grant in India or other programs geared to providing information about employment to returned students can be the most productive.

Returned students also faced conflicting values within the family, and women especially seemed to be torn by a need for more independence and privacy than was permitted in their family situations. Unlike the men, the women who went to the U.S. for studies were more likely to live in a nuclear family than in a joint family. The family was at the same time a source of critical support in the re-entry process and an integral part of the students' identities. The strong ties of the family tended to force the returned students to come to grips with contradictory values and find a balance.

Also important for reintegration was a sense of belonging in India. Those who felt themselves to

be immersed in their home society were likely to be encouraged about the prospects for India's future, and were frequently involved in voluntary or professional activities that they felt contributed to the development of their country and society. Students who do not return to their families and home towns may especially feel alienated from the larger society, even if they do find rewarding positions in their field. Many may need help developing social networks in a new city where they have no connections. Clubs of other returned students from the U.S. might be one way to help alleviate this sense of loss. Returning students can also be encourage to take the initiative to join voluntary efforts.

In addition to the support of the family, the ability to find meaningful work, and a sense of belonging in India, returned students were able to adopt a number of helpful attitudes, strategies, and coping skills that made it possible for them to find this balance and create a satisfying life for themselves in India. These included the ability to step back from themselves to observe the situation objectively, to make changes in their lives that accommodated their new values, and to accept situations that are beyond their control. To the extent that these abilities can be fostered in returning students, their adjustment and reintegration is likely to be more satisfying.

Notes

1. Hood, Mary Ann G. and Schieffer, Kevin J. (eds) *Professional Integration: A Guide for Students from the Developing World*. (Washington, DC: Education for International Development, NAFSA, 1983.)

2. Kevin J. Schieffer, "Mapping the Migration of Talent," *International Educator*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall, 1991), pp 18-22.

3. Some of these programs are described in Frances E. Sullivan, "Completing the Cycle: Promoting Return Migration for Development," *International Educator*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1991), pp 24-25.

4. This point of view is discussed in greater depth in Ong, Paul M., Cheng, Lucie, and Evans, Leslie, "The Migration of Highly Educated Asians." *International Educator*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1991), pp. 26-29.

5. *Open Doors: 1987-1988*. Report on International Educational Exchange. (New York: Institute of International Education, 1987., p. 129.

6. This was the estimate reported by counselors at the USEFI offices in India, and was also the figure given by several interviewees in this study. Since Indians may study and work in the US for any number of years before their return home, this figure should only be considered a rough estimate.

7. Reported in Ong, Paul M., Cheng, Lucie, and Evans, Leslie, "The Migration of Highly Educated Asians." *International Educator*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1991), p. 28.

8. It should be kept in mind that some of those interviewed may have been reluctant to reveal any problems they might have experienced to someone who is a foreigner and a stranger to them.

9. Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, "Final Report: Data Base for Brain Drain: Institution-Based Study," 1989, p. 53.

10. Geert Hofstede, *Cul*ture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980). More recently, Hofstede has developed a fifth dimension of culture, which he calls "Confusion Dynamism." Since this dimension relates more to Asian than Western values, it would probably be interesting to explore it more. Unfortunately no data were yet available for India at the time of this report.

11. This is just one example of the impact of the diversity of language and cultures in India, which undoubtedly has implications for students who return to other cities than their home communities. The limitations of this study did not allow for a thorough investigation of the cultural subregional variations in the re-entry experience.

12. Judith Martin, "The Impact of a Homestay Abroad on Relationships at Home," *Occasional Papers in Intercultural Learning*, No. 8 (September 1985).

13. It should be noted that in most cases there was no real concern with financial security for the parents, since those who have the chance to study in the U.S. by and large come from families who are comfortably well-off in India.

14. Elizabeth Gama and Paul Pedersen, "Readjustment Problems of Brazilian Returnees from Graduate Studies in the United States," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1977), pp. 45-59.